



# News from the Forest



Autumn 2008

## Message from the Founder • Family Forest®: What's in a name?

This summer certainly has been a wet one! Just when we think our boots are going to dry out we get blasted with another gully-washer. The other day, for example, John McNerny and I were out at the Little Hogback Community Forest with Dan Kilburn, Stewardship Forester with the Vermont Land Trust, looking at the retained snag and den trees and the oak trees recently-released by the busy firewood cutters. As we reached the back of the woodlot, the skies opened up. Once we confirmed that we were completely soaked and that there was no sense in resisting it, we were delighted to watch the torrential storm waters disappear into the spongy organic forest floor and to see each of the road dips do its thing. Healthy forest soils and well designed access are especially beautiful to observe in a heavy downpour. Frankly, I could spend the rest of my life getting water to run where and as nature intended! There certainly are worse ways to spend one's time.

Speaking of worse ways of spending one's time, Vermont Family Forests has been wrestling with its name and its federally registered brand recently. First, a little history: In 1994 our good friend Steve Trombulak told us to read *Saving Nature's Legacy: Protecting and Restoring Biodiversity* by Reed Noss and

Allen Cooperrider (Island Press). This book moved our forest conservation thinking ahead significantly. Noss and Cooperrider suggested that we get beyond "the anthropocentric notion that forests are first and foremost for human use." Rather than seeing ourselves as head stewards of the forest, Noss and Cooperrider made it clear that we needed to become respectful members

**Family forestry focuses first on forest health.**

of the forest community and to do a better job of managing the demands we place upon our forests. This was a refreshingly different approach!

We wondered, "What if we were to create a forest conservation organization dedicated to conserving forest health first and then—and only then—to cultivating local, family-owned forests for community benefits and uses?" And if we did succeed in creating this new organization, what would we name it? We started the educational effort in 1995 by offering a series of workshops with the Lewis Creek Association on healthy forests in

cooperation. Inspiration for a name for this educational effort came as we walked down the dairy aisle of the Bristol Grand Union. On the shelf was a bold new brand of milk called "Vermont Family Farms." This was the brainchild of Steven Judge of Shoreham. Local, organic, chemical-free, healthy, community-based, Vermont milk. "If 'Vermont Family Farms' works", we thought, "then why not 'Vermont Family Forests'?"

We are still under the impression that we coined the phrase "family forest" to describe private, family-owned forests—with Steve's significant help and inspiration—right then and there. After getting Steve's blessing, we registered "Vermont Family Forests" with the Vermont Secretary of State and later on we federally registered the brand **Family Forest**® for use in the sale of wood products. The federally-registered brand of **Family Forest** was Paul Ralston's stroke of genius. We also registered the .org and .com URLs for our name and before long we were selling flooring under our **Family Forest**® brand.

Time passed and many people grew interested in using the phrase "family forest." An emerging landowner group in Wisconsin, led by Clyde Samsel, invited Stephen Taylor and me out to Wisconsin

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## Colby Hill Ecological Project

by Marc Lapin

Colby Hill Ecological Project is ten years old and continues to collect baseline biodiversity data on plants, insects, mammals of all sizes, amphibians, reptiles and birds. New this year we've begun to monitor the phenology (timing of flowering) of a suite of plants and to study the farming and land-use history on our main research site, Guthrie-Bancroft Farm. Preliminary results of the historical geography research, which is being conducted by Middlebury College student Ahnnie Lee with help from her advisors Bill Hegman and Jeff Howarth, indicate that the farm has gone through many real-estate transactions and was one of the most intensive sheep operations in Lincoln at the height of "sheep fever." Who would have guessed that this ecological gem with its high diversity of soils, plants and animals, and its dynamic and varied forests would have been the site of quite so many sheep! The land's history will be compiled into a report, complete with maps and historic aerial photographs, by the end of 2008. Information from the history will be folded into the telling of the story of the rewilding of this hill farm.

That is the other big piece of new work that CHEP has undertaken this year. Sandra Murphy will be primary



author of an effort to reveal in words the lessons learned from these lands with their long history of human use and management and now their long future as forever-wild. Our footprints come and go, but the tales of the land endure with a much larger presence. How nature has been altered in the past and how nature has returned to function magnificently on self-willed lands is important information in these times when we look for keys to sustainable use of the home landscapes, be they forests, wetlands, fields, or lawns and gardens.

## Vermont Reptile and Amphibian Atlas Project

by Jim Andrews

The Vermont Reptile and Amphibian Atlas (HerpAtlas) has successfully completed a move to its new office in Salisbury and has been enjoying its new collaboration with VFF. This past year we have been receiving hundreds of reptile and



Left to right: *T. sirtalis* (Common Gartersnake) and *T. sauritus* (Eastern Ribbonsnake)

amphibian reports and herptile conservation inquiries from folks from all corners of the state. Although just an observation at this point, I have been impressed with the increase in the numbers of Milksnake ("spotted adder" to many of us locals) reports. I suspect that the mild winters and warm summers of the last few years have allowed this egg-laying snake to prosper. The Milksnake is an entirely harmless snake, but it will shake its tail and it is often misidentified as a rattlesnake.

We usually target a few species for our own survey efforts. Currently we are following up on leads for three very rare

reptiles with funding from the South Lake Trust and Vermont Fish and Wildlife. These target species are the North



American Racer, the Eastern Ribbonsnake, and the misnamed "Common" Five-lined Skink. We have only two snake species that

are mostly black and grow to over five feet long. Both are rare and of interest, but the Racer is by far the rarest of the two. It is currently only known from one population in the Connecticut River Valley. Unlike the Ratsnake, it is a solid mat black with an entirely gray belly. It is also much more alert and nervous than a Ratsnake. Our second target species, the Eastern Ribbonsnake, looks much like a Gartersnake but it is much thinner, more cleanly marked, and has clear white cheeks (upper lips) and a dark-red head. In contrast, the Gartersnake has yellow cheeks and a dark green head. If you think you may have seen a Ribbonsnake, please send us a photo! The final target species is Vermont's only lizard (think snake with legs). Currently it is only known from West Haven, Vermont.

Of course, we are always interested in photos and reports of all reptile and amphibian species. Check out the Vermont Reptile and Amphibian Atlas website (<http://community.middlebury.edu/~herpatlas>) and let us know what you are seeing.

## Community Wood Energy Update

In the summer and fall of 2007, VFF was fortunate to work with two forestry graduate students on the subject of community wood energy. What if a community wanted to produce and use





wood energy in ways that were at once sustainable, efficient, local, and fair? Caitlin Cusack, graduate student from the Yale School of Forestry, focused her efforts on creating a community resource guide entitled "Harnessing The Power of Local Wood Energy: Ensuring a sustainable supply of woodchips for your school." Emily Schadler, graduate student from the University of Vermont's Field Naturalist program, completed "A Case Study of Woodchip Fuel at Mt. Mansfield Union High School in Jericho, Vermont." Both studies are excellent and both are available at familyforests.org. Hard copies are available for loan at the VFF office.

The energy crunch is heating up. Heating oil at this writing is now over \$4.00 per gallon and gasoline is well over \$3.75 per gallon. Split, green, delivered wood is now \$220.00 per cord if you can find it. Two local sawmills have moved from into wood fuels in a very big way. A wood pellet plant is currently being considered for Addison County. At the same time, global wood biomass shipments are expected to be well above the record of 11 million tons reached in 2007, this up from just 5.6 million tons in 2003. Three million tons of that



Milling Family Forest® flooring at North Station Millworks in North Ferrisburgh.

2007 woody biomass were in the form of pellets. Pellets are clean and easy to store. However, they do have an enormous amount of embedded energy and they can be shipped around the world. With the

strong Euro, will there be a sucking sound created by pellets whizzing out of Addison County? This bears watching!

Traditional firewood has the benefit of being readily-procured and burned with a very minimal amount of associated technology. VFF is connecting producers of and customers for Family Forest® Fuelwood. Our goal is to create a system that is at once sustainable, efficient, local and fair. If you are interested in buying firewood for the 2009-2010 heating season, please call us at 802.453.7728.

## SUSTAINABLE FORESTRY

### Certification Update

VFF is scheduled for Forest Stewardship Council Re-certification in December of this year. This will mark the beginning of our third five-year contract. Once that is completed, we will seek Organic Woodland Certification through the UK's Soil Association.

### Family Forest® Flooring Update

VFF assisted Lynn and Willy Osborn with their Family Forest® Flooring and Millwork Project. The white ash, sugar and red maple, yellow and white birch, and black cherry trees were carefully harvested from the Osborn's Lincoln Forest by Dennis Weaver of Starksboro. The logs were then trucked by Jerry Carrier of New Haven, sawn and the lumber dried by Stephan Taylor of Lincoln, and milled into high quality flooring and millwork by Kurt Plank of North Station Millwork in North Ferrisburgh. Most of the wood will reside in Warren. There is some additional ash flooring available. If you are interested, please call the VFF office.

VFF continues to partner with the Vermont Land Trust and the Vermont Sustainable Jobs Fund on the Green Wood Collaborative. We seek to develop

and adopt measureable forest management standards that will serve as the basis of a more standardized Vermont-FSC (Forest Stewardship Council™) certification process for a commercially-viable scale of Vermont wood products.

### Forestry

by *Brendan Weiner*

It has been a busy field season for us here at VFF. We have worked with several landowners to complete forest management plan updates for the current use program including: Harry Atkinson and Lisa Marchetti of Monkton, Martha Osmun of Lincoln, Mike and Katie Quinn of North Ferrisburgh and Jim Lienau and Brenda Myrick of Lincoln. We also helped the Davis family of Shoreham, the Miller



UVM Students at Little Hogback Community Forest.

family of Norwich, Tom Verner and Janet Fredericks of Lincoln, and Ron and Kristen DeBellis of Monkton to enroll their lands in the current use program. And we still have a few more plans to complete this summer and fall!

In addition to management planning, we have been working with Jim Dumont and Karen Lueders to organize a small timber sale on their land in Lincoln that will provide VFF-certified firewood for our growing Family Forest Firewood program. VFF also helped Ian and



Vermont Family Forests™ is a nonprofit education organization whose mission is to conserve the health of the forest community and, when appropriate, to promote the careful cultivation of local family forests for community benefit.

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## Forestry Update

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Marjorie Rutherford of North Ferrisburgh to improve their timber stand while enhancing aesthetics and wildlife habitat on their property.

We continue to provide other forestry services such as firewood marking, GIS mapping, road and trail design, sugarbush development, timber sale administration, invasive species mitigation, and general forest consultations. If you have any thoughts, questions or concerns about your forest, or have been thinking about doing some work but are unsure about how to get started, please don't hesitate to call.



## What's in a Name?

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to tell our story and to show us theirs. While there, Clyde asked if we would mind if their group used the name "family forest." We appreciated being asked and gladly agreed as long as they would agree to put forest health before forest use and to model their forestry after natural forests rather than cornfields. Other organizations followed.

We were still a bit surprised, and even chagrined, to learn that the American Tree Farm System® planned to refer to its certified tree farms as certified family forests. After all, we had developed family forestry, at least in part, as an alternative to tree farming. Rather than focusing on the sustainable production of wood, water, recreation, and wildlife, **family forestry focuses on forest health as indicated by the status of water quality, site productivity, native biological diversity, carbon storage, and the impacts of invasive exotics.** Now there would be a sign that essentially equated tree farming with family forestry!

So, we have been working on an agreement with the American Forest Foundation. Please stay tuned.

Vermont Family Forests was and is "The Original Certified Family Forest™." And **Family Forest® wood products** will continue to come from forests where forest health is job one!

May the (family) forest be with you!

—David Brynn

## VFF Staff News

VFF Forester **Brendan Weiner** and his wife, Rachel, welcomed daughter Josephine Wren Weiner on May 19, 2008. She weighed 5 pounds, 4 ounces and was 19 inches tall.



# UPCOMING EVENTS: WORKSHOPS, EXPLORATIONS, AND CELEBRATIONS

## 2008 ADDISON COUNTY CONSERVATION CONGRESS

Addison County in Transition:  
Visioning Our Community in 2020 and  
Mapping the Next Steps to Get There

**WHEN?** Saturday, October 25, 8:30 am – 4:00 pm

**WHERE?** Mount Abraham Union High School

The 7<sup>th</sup> Addison County Conservation Congress is taking shape under the careful and creative direction of Jonathan Corcoran. The Congress is co-sponsored this year by the Addison County Relocalization Network (ACoRN).

There will be **theatre, song, local food, and pageantry** as we come together to design the transition. After John Elder sets the stage for what Addison County may be like when we are 12 years deeper into climate change, peaked oil supplies, and a significantly altered economy, participants will head off to one of the **12 rooms of our community** for deliberation and design. A sample of the rooms includes:

- |                                |                                  |
|--------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Food and Farming               | Housing and Shelter              |
| Heat and Power                 | Health and Wellness              |
| Business and Enterprise        | Transportation and Communication |
| Money and Banking              | School and Life-Long Learning    |
| Governance and Public Security | Social and Community Services    |
| Community Arts and Culture     | Spirituality and Consciousness   |

Participants will arrive at visions for each of the rooms, action plans, and artistic renderings. The Addison County Localvores and NOFA-VT will prepare a delicious, locally-grown lunch. The day will climax with a Community Declaration of Interdependence in written words and graphic arts.

**Suggested donation:** Adults \$10, Students \$5 and localvore lunch available for \$8

## GAME OF LOGGING

The Game of Logging training program combines Scandinavian logging techniques with the latest systems for working safely around trees. We cannot overstate the value of these courses. We have participants who've used chainsaws for 30 years prior to taking GOL Level I say that the course changed the way they work in the woods. *Registration forms available on our website.*

### Fall 2008

**Levels I and II are full.**

**Level III:** October 16 (rain date 10/23)

### Spring 2009

**Level I:** April 2 (rain date 4/9)

**Level II:** April 9 (rain date 4/16)

**Level III:** April 16 (rain date 4/23)



## Organic Sugarbush Management

**WHEN?** October 9, 2008 10:00 am - 12:00 pm

**WHERE?** Brown Hill Sugarhouse, 1027 Big Hollow Road, Starksboro

Join VFF's David Brynn and organic sugar makers Don Dolliver, Brown Hill Sugarhouse, and Kurt Kling, #15 School House Maple, for organic sugarbush management. Topics include: regeneration, erosion control, crop tree release, organic invasive plants control, snags for wildlife, healthy spouts, managing nature in the sugarbush, monitoring tap closures, and forest management plans required for organic certification. Co-sponsored by Northeast Organic Farming Association of Vermont. Please bring a lunch.

**Cost:** \$10 for NOFA members, \$15 for non-members

**Contact:** NOFA-VT via phone at 802.434.4122, via email at [info@nofavt.org](mailto:info@nofavt.org) or on the web at [www.nofavt.org](http://www.nofavt.org)



Jonathan Blake

Attendees of the Beltane festival danced with joy around the May Pole.

## PUBLIC EDUCATION AND CELEBRATION

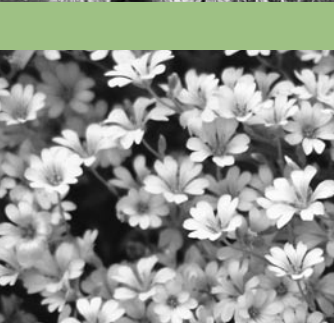
The 5<sup>th</sup> Annual Beltane Celebration, the Amphibians in the Self-Willed Forest workshop with Jim Andrews, and three sessions of Game of Logging were all held at the Waterworks Property earlier this year. All were very well received. The Watershed Center was a co-sponsor.

For more information about any of these events, please visit our website at [familyforests.org](http://familyforests.org) or call 802.453.7728.



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## VFF IN THE NEWS

Check out the latest issue of *Orion Magazine*. The September/October 2008 issue includes an article entitled "Making Other Arrangements: Stories for a Sustainable Future" in which the first section describes the use of wood biofuel to heat more than thirty public schools across Vermont.

To read more, visit [www.orionmagazine.com](http://www.orionmagazine.com) or pick up a copy at your local bookstore.